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ABSTRACT

A project was undertaken to analyze, identify, and catalog materials in the collection of the Old Slave Mart Museum of Black Heritage of Sullivan's Island, South Carolina. The collection, begun in 1937, emphasizes the contributions to American culture made by Afro-American slaves. An initial inventory of 25,000 items has been cataloged. Though funds were not available to open the library to the public, plans were made to make materials available to schools, instructional programs, and special bicentennial programs. (EMH)

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Interim Report

Project No. L0008JA

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Reinforcement of a Black Cultural Museum Through the Development of Its Library Resources in the Field of Black Studies to provide Educational and Research Material With a Wide Application

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Chapter I - Introduction

A. PROBLEM

It has been the objective of this project to analyze all the resources in the field of Black Studies that are contained in the collection of The Old Slave Mart Museum, the oldest museum of Afro-American history and art in the country, and to improve its library storage and retrieval systems so that these resources can be made more available to meet the escalating demands made upon it. Up to the present time available funds have been insufficient to utilize to full advantage the tremendous educational resources to which this museum has access. It has been impossible to bring together the many individuals and organizations in need of materials relevant to Afro-American culture and the unique collection of realia and library materials that comprise The Old Slave Mart Museum Collection.

Previous efforts have been greatly hampered by inadequate financial support. The Museum is operated by The Miriam B. Wilson Foundation, a tax-exempt, public foundation (under 501-c(3) of the Internal Revenue Code) which was chartered in 1962 to operate a non-profit, eleemosynary institution for educational purposes. It is dedicated to continuing the work of the museum's late founder, Miss Miriam B. Wilson, by documenting and disseminating data concerning black contributions to American history and culture. In addition to supporting The Old Slave Mart Museum, the activities of this Foundation's education office have included conducting outreach programs in deprived black neighborhoods, providing educational programs in schools, and colleges, answering innumerable requests from museums and publishers for materials and information; and assisting degree candidates in history and art. So far these efforts have been supported through a small admission charge at the museum, and occasional small contributions from public and private donors, not to mention the work of dedicated volunteers. These have proved inadequate in the past, however, and will be much more so in the future as more and more demands are placed upon the Foundation's limited funds and facilities.

The Foundation is hampered by the physical limitations of the small museum building which was in 1975 listed in the National Register of Historic Buildings. Once a slave-auction house, it is an historic landmark in itself, but inadequate when it comes to handling the tremendous crowds of school children which come to its doors by the busload. Additionally, many children from low-income families never venture out of their neighborhoods, either because of cultural patterns, timidity, or lack of transportation. It is

believed that further development of the museum's library materials and their utilization in more ambitious community outreach programs would help to overcome these variations in usage caused by geographic, economic, or racial patterns.

These library materials are absolutely unique because the museum was founded in 1937 when many ex-slaves and ex-slaveholders were still alive, and therefore the museum contains the only sizable collection of authenticated slave-made handcrafts and other artifacts of Afro-American history in the country, as well as library documents which establish their provenance. It was undoubtedly the first museum to concern itself with relating the Afro-American's culture to his African background and it exhibits many examples of African art and crafts illustrative of the transition from African to American culture. The photographs, documents, books, maps, notebooks, files and other materials that comprise the balance of its collection have been amassed over the past 35 years, either by Miss Wilson, or by the visionary men and women who undertook to continue her work after her death. These foresighted people founded the Miriam B. Wilson Foundation to continue her goals.

That they have been successful is unquestionable, as in the past ten years the museum's visitors have increased from some 1200 a year to over 38,000. Though this has been gratifying, it has sorely taxed the foundation's financial resources and the small and overburdened museum staff. Further escalation, which is inevitable, will bring this situation to a critical stage. As the fame of this small organization continues to spread, and interest in the cultural background of Afro-Americans increases, it is obvious there will be a need to improve the foundation's ability to meet these growing demands.

To accomplish this the foundation needed to have better control over its resources, particularly its library components, which has been sorely neglected due to lack of funds and shortage of staff. The Old Slave Mart Museum Collection had never been completely inventoried, much less properly catalogued. Storage and retrieval systems were wholly inadequate to meet the demands of scholars, students, publishers and the general public. Library services offered by the foundation needed to be better integrated in school and academic instructional programs and made more accessible to the low-income and minority groups through increased community outreach programs.

6. OBJECTIVES

It is the ultimate objective of the Foundation to establish this black cultural museum and to administer its library resources in the field of black history with an in order to provide a viable information center in this relevant discipline. To accomplish this it would be necessary to bring together the realia and library materials which comprise the Old Slave Mart Collection. At the present time limitations of space, storage facilities and staff time make it necessary to house most of the library components of the collection at a different location from the artifacts and documentary evidence in museum exhibits. To circumvent the ramifications of both they should eventually be combined under one roof, so as to best contribute to each other. This combination of a research library and a museum would be of invaluable value to the schools and colleges of South Carolina, as well through the means of a published catalogue, to educators in other parts of the United States, and of the world.

Such a center would differ from others in one important aspect. Up to the present time most libraries collecting materials concerned with black history have been directed towards historical or sociological information. As far as we know, the center planned from The Old Slave Mart Collection would be unique in this time, since The Miriam B. Wilson Foundation's main concern would be the cultural history of black Americans. Its location in the heart of the Sea Islands of South Carolina would be particularly fortuitous, since this "island" region has long been recognized by scholars as a transitional between Africa and African-American cultures. It is frequently visited by scholars conducting field studies in history, ethnology, or folklore. The proximity of a research center would greatly facilitate such undertakings.

It is believed that the development of such a center in the Deep South would be especially valuable. It could serve as a model for similar cultural information centers throughout the country, whether directed towards black studies, or to the cultures of other ethnic groups, such as the American Indian, or the Mexican-American.

The project now in progress, to survey and catalogue our resources, and improve storage facilities, as well as develop new outreach materials, will be the first step towards achieving the above long-range goals.

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A. [illegible]

[illegible] During the first quarter our principal [illegible] Mr. The services of an additional [illegible] Mr. Hospital & Warehouse, was assisted and a young Grade Technician, Miss Beverly Smith, was employed as a library trainee. Mr. Kenneth Wells, an R.A. at Clifton Reserve, had had some experience in processing material in their warehouse. Both is Assistant Storekeeper and in the College of Agriculture. Miss Patricia Whitaker, Mr. Wells, Medical Stores Librarian at the Medical Faculty Library at the College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, to the Stores Library. Miss Smith came to [illegible] Mr. Reynolds had had considerable training in accessioning and was responsible for the accessioning of all stock. Miss Whitaker, who had been in charge of the Medical Stores Library at the College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, was responsible for the cataloguing of the stock. A small section in the Library, which was set up in the Medical Stores Library, was responsible for the cataloguing of [illegible] Miss Beverly Hughes. This was based on the Medical Stores Library and was responsible for the cataloguing of [illegible] Miss Patricia Whitaker and Miss Beverly Smith were responsible for the [illegible] Mr. Reynolds was responsible for the

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

number was placed on the frame itself, not the ideal solution but at least a temporary expedient.

Once back on the Island the staff completed the work of cataloging realia by accessioning articles in the storage room by the same method used at the museum. It was found that about one-third of the collection of realia were on the Island, and two-thirds on exhibit at the museum, making a total of some 700 artifacts.

During the third quarter (March-April-May) the following was accomplished:

1.) Alphabetical finding lists were prepared in order to facilitate the development of a consistent and standardized terminology for cataloging purposes.

2.) A system for cataloging realia was devised and approved.

3.) Standard lists of museum categories, subject headings, and appropriate added entries were produced.

4.) Additional boxes of archival materials from Miss Wilson's personal effects were opened and inventoried, including some 200 photographs of Low Country scenes, and historic Charleston buildings, taken in the early part of this century.

5.) Work proceeded on inventorying and accessioning slides, photographs and pictorial flatwork.

6.) Laminating of documents continued and they, together with maps and pictorial flatwork, were stored in a 10 drawer steel map case.

Our most difficult problem during this time was to decide how to duplicate our card sets for the card catalog. The SCM 111 we had leased was ideal as an office photocopier and made excellent reproductions of photographs, (much better half-tones, in fact, than the Xerox) but it was an electrostatic machine and had to use special paper, so we were unable to utilize it for reproduction of catalog cards. Another method had to be found. The obvious alternative used by many professional libraries, would have been to rent a Xerox photocopier, Model 1000, which could accept card stock in 4-up or 6-up cards. This proved to be prohibitive in price, as well as presenting technical difficulties for our small office and electrical system.

For some weeks we thought we could make arrangements to utilize card reproduction Xerox machines at the Robert Smalls Library, though this would have been a bit awkward to manage since it would have been necessary to operate them only when not in use by the College of Charleston. The twelve miles distance between the college and our office had to be taken into consideration also. With the advice of Miss Barbare, Head of Technical Services at the South Carolina State Library, it was eventually decided to send the typed master cards to a professional company (General Microfilm Co.) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for duplication. This proved very satisfactory. The quality of their work was excellent (though the card stock they used was not an exact match to the cream color of the master card, this was considered to be a minor detail). A box of master cards would be made up for shipment with a list of duplicates needed and mailed, if possible, by Thursday. If General Microfilm received a box by a Monday, we would receive the duplicated cards back by the following Monday. Each duplicate card cost us 7¢.

By June we were ready to begin the card catalog itself, and a 15,000 card cabinet had been purchased from Demco Library Supplies. We selected Demco partly because they carried cabinets of high-impact plastic, which would stand up better in this damp climate than would wooden ones. However, due to new material uncovered as we proceeded with our inventories, this proved to be an underestimate of our needs and by August we were forced to purchase another 10,000 capacity unit, making 25,000 in all.

To expedite work on the cataloging, a young student from the College of Charleston was engaged part time to type subject headings as the duplicate sets came back. Concurrently, Miss Gantt was producing master cards of photographs and slides while Mr. Hornbeck accessioned and researched the remainder of the documents (those not on display in the museum) and worked out a system of classification of flatwork. When Miss Christina Ewan, the part-time typist, was not using the typewriter, Mr. Hornbeck typed master cards for books.

Since Mrs. Chase was not actively involved in this technical phase of the project, her time was spent during this period with re-organizing verticle files, arranging paintings and drawings in the storage room to correspond with the numbered sequence in the accession lists, uncovering odds and ends of library materials previously overlooked, or stored in the attic, and answering questions posed by the staff, plus continuing her usual administrative duties.

Concurrently with all these activities throughout the project, a verticle reference file was growing to provide useful information on provenance of the collection, donors, Black American artists, Black African artists, African Art, Black History Museums, Exhibitions of black artist's work, Black History, S.C., and Black History, USA. Some of these files contain letters and newspaper clippings which later will be photocopied during the next Grant period, while others contain leaflets, booklets, and similar material.

C. STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL

Although, throughout the process of inventorying and cataloging, re-filing and storing was also proceeding, and are mentioned throughout the report above, it may be helpful to specify these more clearly, and to explain whatever problems were involved.

1.) Artifacts and Art Objects: Those not on exhibition in the museum were repacked in boxes and stored again in the upstairs storage room; African objects in one location, Afro-American in another, for ease in retrieval. Photography of these was postponed, as this was a time-consuming project to be carried out by Mrs. Chase, who felt she had other priorities.

2.) Books, Booklets, Bulletins and Magazines: Three seven foot steel bookcases were used for these. All books were shelved in the library office, and marked with call number flags. This was done in preference to marking the spines of the books, since many of them were rare volumes, and would not be circulating in any case. Booklets, many of them rare and OP, were placed within stiff protective covers made of acid-free wrapping paper, labeled with call numbers and shelved with the books. All valuable books in poor condition were completely wrapped in this paper and tied with cotton tape. Magazines and professional journals are to be placed in Pamphlet Boxes but this has been delayed due to its low priority. Hopefully, it will be accomplished in the Continuation Grant period, October 1, 1975-July 1, 1976. Most of these will be kept in the Foundation (Mrs. Chase's) office.

3.) Documents, Maps, Engravings, Original Paintings, Drawings and Graphics: All documents, both original and photostats were stored in the steel map case, as were maps, and pictorial flatwork not framed, except for photographs.

4.) Photographs: Photographs were stored in 8 x 10 glassine envelopes and the P-accession numbers written on the upper right hand corner with a "Sharpie" pen (permanent, waterproof, smearproof, writes-on-anything felt pen). These come in colors and it was first thought a color code could be used to indicate categories, since the envelopes are filed in numerical order. However, this idea was abandoned as being both unnecessary and impractical; the glassine envelopes were placed in "Vertiflex" hanging files in convenient sized groups, and placed in a steel file case in the library office.

5.) Negatives: Negatives were treated similarly, except that P-N numbers were used to correspond with P numbers, and they were stored in a file case in the Foundation office. This was done to separate negatives from positives for security reasons. The file case used was especially purchased with 4½" x 12" drawers at the top. Each of these drawers was divided longitudinally by adjustable dividers, which enabled it to accommodate conveniently the various sized negatives, from 35 mm film strips to 5" x 7" glass plates.

6.) Slides: Master copies of slides were accessioned by writing the number on a small press-apply label attached to the slide mount. The slide was then replaced in projection slide trays in which they had been kept before, and returned to a small portable cabinet kept in the Foundation office. The only duplicates in the collection are in the form of slide lectures, boxed, with accompanying teacher's guide. These are kept in the closet of the library office for separation from master copies.

7.) Archival Material: Miss Wilson's archives were roughly divided into groups to indicate whether or not they were personal or museum related, boxed, and the boxes stored upstairs. Archival materials relating to the museum's operation since Miss Wilson's death in 1957 was not reviewed systematically although files were rifled to abstract letters or information relative to identification and provenance of the collection acquired since then. Nothing was done to sort or file financial records, guest registers and similar museum records at this time. The Archivists have made certain recommendations regarding the eventual disposition of this

material, but this year's grant allowed neither time nor money enough to begin this time-consuming work. Since the provenance of the papers themselves has been disturbed several times since Miss Wilson's death (due to several moves and handling by a number of untrained people), it will be no more difficult to sort them at a later time, though this is certainly considered advisable to do and was strongly recommended by The South Caroline Department of Archives and History.

8. Newspapers and News Clippings: These appear to pose the biggest problem to our small library, for the following reasons:

a. Everyone agrees that though back issues of 20th century newspapers can be obtained through public libraries and/or newspaper offices, they are unlikely to be indexed. For this reason our large collection of clippings, all on the subject of black people, both African and Afro-American would be of inestimable value to researchers and scholars. Additionally, most of these are already filed categorically, and eventually a library catalog could be developed that would be helpful in cross indexing this material.

b. There is also a concensus of opinion as to the fragility of newsprint, and the ineffectiveness of any conservation methods. The best solution appears to be to reproduce the information and not bother to save the originals.

c. There are three possible solutions to the reproduction problem and one of them, retyping the information, is impractical. The ideal, perhaps, would be to transfer the clippings to microfilm or microfiche, which would economize on storage space. However, this appears to be too expensive, whether we purchase a camera to make our own, or contract to have it done by a professional company. Furthermore, it leaves a new problem, how to obtain the funds (and the space) for the necessary equipment for projecting the micro-films or microfiches? The third alternative would be to photocopy the material, preferably on permalife bond. Should the expense prove prohibitive, the SCM copier could make less permanent reproductions, and would at least be better for reproducing any illustrations on the clippings.

Chapter III - RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our conclusion at the end of this first phase of our project bears out what we anticipated initially, i.e. No one category of materials is of great importance by itself, the strength (and uniqueness) of this collection lies in the fact that it is a learning resource center of multi-media, almost exclusively on one subject - the cultural history of black Americans. Researching a reading information must often spend long hours in several different libraries to gather together a few bits and pieces of information on the subject of black Americans.

The components of the collection, like the fingers on the hand, are stronger when working together. A researcher doing a paper on a particular black artist, for instance, may, within this small collection find the following reference tools:

a) A photograph of the artist himself.

b) Biographical data from books and exhibition catalogs.

c) Letters from the artist, either explaining some of his work, or giving further information not usually included in the routine biographical directories.

d) Newspaper clippings relevent to the artist and his work.

e) Books relating to his work to the work of other artists and to the period in which he worked.

f) Photographs of a number of the artist's works.

g) Slides of the artist's work.

h) A cassette taped interview with the artist.

i) An analysis of the artist's work by art critics.

j) Early out-of-print catalogs of exhibitions in which his work was represented.

k) One or more original works by the artist among the realia in the museum collection.

It is not meant to be implied that the collection can produce a variety of materials on every black artist represented in the library and museum, but it is typical of many

of them, and holds true for other subjects as well.

There is no doubt that development of the library collection has greatly strengthened this branch service to the community. Although the library materials could be made of this unique study collection due to degree of a personal visit, which was frequently not possible for the people who most needed the information. Fortunately, fundraising in the collection are on hand a job fragile that they do not have pending are on loan to a other database. Aside from the fact that the collection is to be conveniently small and the demands so great, it would prove the access here to extend to them. In the other hand, library materials (and themselves well to outreach programs, either by use of U.S. Materials, photographic prints, printing or photocopies of pictures and/or documents, duplication of old maps and pictorial material, as well as a newspaper clippings. The necessary captions and information can accompany these can be obtained either from our materials & information files, or our reference library of books.

Although the education office of the a museum had long been supplying with requests for such materials from correspondence, the volume of such requests has greatly increased in recent (Conversation) years with the current emphasis on ethnic activities. Throughout the country many Bicentennial programs have been funded to provide information & improving the communications gaps to black americans to our cultures and heritage. Interest generated by these has spread to local governments, schools and community organizations all across the country. The deluge of requests, by phone or letter, which we have received indicate there is great difficulty in obtaining materials on this subject elsewhere. Although our position is unique, and we must devote the majority of our time to it, we try to comply with such request as best we can, giving preference to Bicentennial programs. Following is a list of a few of these Bicentennial Projects to which we have provided assistance, information and/or exhibits materials:

1.) The American Freedom Train Foundation

2.) "200 Years of American Banking" - Division of Numismatics, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

3.) The African Impact, Black Discovery Committee, Charleston Bicentennial Committee.

4.) Black Festival, Ethnic Heritage Committee, Charleston Bicentennial.

5.) The Black Presence in the Continental Line, afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, Washington, D. C.

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